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ABSTRACT

To educate young people to be productive citizens and to ensure that the democratic objective of equality is realized, service learning must adopt an alternative paradigm that promotes the ideals and values of participatory democracy. Three problematic assumptions of service learning are that (1) good citizenship requires students to "give" back to their community; (2) good citizenship involves performing service that remediates the "needs" of others; and (3) the conceptualization of service as a form of charity. These assumptions result in service learning practices that create a bifurcation between the student and the recipient where the position and voice of the student is privileged and the knowledge and the experience of the recipient of service is devalued. A more equitable paradigm for a democratic education component of service learning is one that blurs the distinction between students and service recipients and implements a reciprocal dimension to the learning process. This paradigmatic shift reflects the assumptions and goals of participatory research which include the notions of collaboration, self-reflectivity by all participants, and mutual empowerment. As pedagogical praxis, participatory research teaches the ideals and values of a participatory democracy to all service learning partners. (Contains 28 references.) (RS)

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Implementing a Reciprocal Dimension to Service Learning:

Participatory Research as a Pedagogical Enterprise

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> We are a nation founded upon active citizenship and participation in community life. We have always believed that individuals can and should serve. It is crucial that service toward the common good be combined with reflective learning to assure that service programs of high quality can be created and sustained over time, and to help individuals appreciate how service can be a significant and ongoing part of life. Service, combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both. Those who serve and those who are served are thus able to develop the informed judgment, imagination, and skills that lead to a greater capacity to contribute to the common good.
>
> (Johnson Foundation, 1989, p. 1).

Instead of just dispensing facts, educators have increasingly been directed to help their students develop critical thinking skills, problem solving abilities, and research skills, as well as prepare students to participate as socially responsible citizens in a democratic society (Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Goodlad, 1984). Traditional models of instruction promote different objectives as to how best accomplish these goals. Information processing models concentrate on the cognitive dimensions of learning. Social models, on the other hand, stress social interaction and human interdependence (Darling, 1990). Service learning however, has emerged as an innovative means of combining these two instructional traditions in efforts to accomplish multiple pedagogical goals. Service learning is commonly defined as "a curricular option used to involve students in experiential service projects that are designed to enhance learning outcomes while addressing community needs" (Maybach, 1996, p. 225). Students involved in service learning project might work with the homeless, initiate a substance abuse educational project, or

participate in environmental protection activities. Research evidence indicates that service learning may have a beneficial effect upon the development of positive self-esteem, moral development, and higher order thinking skills of students (Kraft, 1996). However, the relationship between service learning and the successful preparation of students to be citizens in a participatory democracy is less clear.

This paper focuses on the citizenship, or democratic education goal of service learning. Philosophical support for democratic education is found throughout the history of educational reform efforts. In Democracy and Education, Dewey (1916) argues that democracy should be a "way of life". Individuals should conduct themselves at home, work, and within the community in ways that reflect principles of democratic citizenship. Progressivists further Dewey's argument, saying that schools should inculcate the values of social reform and teach the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to accomplish it. Reconstructionists promote schools as change agents of society (Olszewski & Bussler, 1993). More recently, Barber (1992) suggests that community service, citizenship education, and service learning are crucial to the survival of American society.

If democratic education is one goal of service learning (Dewey, 1916; Goodlad, 1984; Tyler, 1989), then its theoretical assumptions and practices should reflect the egalitarian values and beliefs of democratic ideology. These ideals and values include: the representation of all voices; the opportunity to reflect and act in concert with others; and the empowerment of all citizens (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992). I am concerned however, that many of the assumptions underlying the democratic education goal of service learning do not embody the ideals and values of participatory democracy.

In this paper, I examine three of these problematic assumptions. One assumption, is that good citizenship requires students to "give" back to their community. Another, is that good citizenship involves performing service that remediates the "needs" of others. A final assumption is the conceptualization of service as a form of charity. I contend that these assumptions result in service learning practices that create a bifurcation between the student and the recipient where the position and voice of the student is privileged and the knowledge and the experience of the recipient of service is devalued. This bifurcation prevents service learning from educating students as to what it means to be citizens in a participatory democracy because democratic values of equality are not realized.

Furthermore, I argue that a more equitable paradigm for a democratic education component of service learning, is one that blurs the distinction between students and service recipients and implements a reciprocal dimension to the learning process. This paradigmatic shift reflects the assumptions and goals of participatory research which include: notions of collaboration; self-reflectivity by all participants; and mutual empowerment (Maguire, 1987). Participatory research, as both theory and practice, insures that the relationship between service participants is reciprocal, mutually informing, and furthers the goals and practices of a participatory democracy.

Participatory research is relevant to education in general and service learning in particular because it has emerged from and been strongly influenced by adult education reform efforts. Questioning traditional education practices that nurture social relationships based on dominance, Third World adult educators emphasize the importance of critical consciousness for social change (Freire, 1970). The Highlander Folk School, in their work with poor Appalachian mountain people, use education as a tool to question and

challenge unjust an society, particularly in areas of labor and civil rights (Adams, 1975). Educators involved with the Participatory Research Network, sponsored in 1977 by the International Council for Adult Education, are committed to using education and research approaches which actively involve local people (Participatory Research Network, 1983:3).

Problematic Assumptions of Service Learning Programs

In 1989, educators from around the nation gathered to develop a set of principles to guide service learning programs. The resulting model is one that:

1. Engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.
2. Provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.
3. Articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.
4. Allows for those with needs to define those needs.
5. Clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.
6. Matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.
7. Expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.
8. Includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.
9. Insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.
10. Is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.

(Johnson Foundation, 1989, p. 2-3)

These principles have been widely disseminated and accepted by educators across the nation. However, although several of these principles acknowledge the service recipient, controversial issues surrounding the means and ends of service learning have been pushed to the background. Who gets to define what is the common good? What values are being promoted? What kind of relationship develops between the student and the individual they "serve." Are students aware of the social and political implications of their service? (see Kraft, 1996; Maybach, 1996). More specifically, what service learning practices allow for the voice of service recipients to be represented? How are recipients enabled to define their needs, self-reflect about those needs, and ensure that their best interests are being served? These questions, among others, raise important concerns about whether service learning furthers the representation of all voices, the opportunity to reflect and act in concert with others, and the empowerment of all citizens, all of which are critical values and ideals of a participatory democracy.

The first problematic assumption, is that good citizenship requires students to "give" back to their community. While the notion of "giving" back may appear to imply responsibility and reciprocity, it also carries connotations of obligation and self-focus. Students may perceive the community as a type of marketplace, one in which commodities (public services) are exchanged for a price. "Giving" back becomes equated with "paying" back, and once a sense of "payback" has occurred any sense of obligation to the community, for the community's sake, is diminished. Additionally, when student's "give" back to the community, the act of service and its outcomes are focused on the individual self as opposed to the "community". Service activities are identified and operationalized in terms of how best a student can accomplish the goal of "giving" and any outcomes of service are acknowledged as the student's own.

Service labeled as an individual activity of restitution is counter to the ideal of reflecting and acting in concert with others because it does not account for the equal, emergent and collaborative nature of participation by all citizens in a democratic society.

The second problematic assumption, is that good citizenship involves performing service to remediate the "needs" of others. While this emphasis may highlight social inequalities, it also promotes distinctions in the service relationship. Needs discourse encourages students to perceive the world as divided between those who have and have not, between those who give and those who get, between those who do and those who are done-to. Students are positioned in the role of provider, versus recipient, and in addition to restitution, their service becomes an act of remediation.

Students begin to identify those they serve by generic labels. They are the young, the old, the illiterate, the poor, all of which are not just demographic categories but are shaped by social and moral values. Norms and standards of privilege and neediness are established. Students are tempted with the illusion that others have needs while they do not. Thus the ability to respond to those needs is a sign of powerfulness, of personal potency and activity. Those served are most often relegated to roles of impotency and passivity. Service focused on the remediation of the "needs" of others is contrary to the democratic ideas of the representation of all voices and of mutual empowerment. "Needs" defined by those in dominant positions, teachers, students, and community agency personnel, reflect a "we know what's best for you" attitude and not only limits the recipient from defining their own needs but from satisfying those needs in ways that resonate with their own experience.

The final problematic assumption is the conceptualization of service as a form of charity. While this assumption may meet the student's need for personal

relevance and character building, it also disconnects service from the type of political participation that furthers democracy. Altruistic motives encourage service activities designed to remediate needs. Left out of the equation, is the political examination of the settings and institutions in which the needs occur and what barriers keep individuals from fully participating in society. Additionally, the effects of service are rarely examined. Freire (1970) argues. "In order to have the continued opportunity to express their "generosity", oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well" (p. 26). Students that perceive service learning activities as opportunities to "do good," while providing help to others, although unintentional, are in fact perpetuating an oppressive situation. Conceptualizing service as strictly charity, without any political focus, not only creates and recreates structures and processes that further disenfranchise those "served", it also prevents opportunities for resistance to materialize. The values and ideals of participatory democracy, those of voice, reflection, and empowerment are thus severely constrained.

Towards a More Equitable Paradigm

Citizenship in a democracy is more than a legal construct with clearly defined individual rights and responsibilities. It is a concept that goes beyond what we do and think as individuals to a common way of thinking about our shared interests and common life. It is only when equal consideration and voice is given to all members of a community that we begin to move toward a truly democratic society (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992). For service learning to promote the ideals and values of a participatory democracy, educative goals and activities must promote the representation of all participants' voices, opportunities must exist for all participants to reflect and act in concert with one another, and mutual empowerment must be a focus of service activities. The assumptions of democratic education must shift away from ones that create

polarized roles in the service relationship and instead be premised upon assumptions of collaboration, mutual reflexivity, and the empowerment of all service participants. These assumptions reflect a participatory research paradigm.

The explicit aim of participatory research is to bring about a more just society. Instead of simply being an approach to theory or methods of research, participatory research "explicitly seeks pragmatic results as it provides a framework in which people seeking to overcome oppressive situations can come to understand the social forces in operation and gain strength in collective action" (Park, 1978, p. 3). The goals of participatory research include human self-determination, personal and social transformation, and emancipation (Horton, 1981; Brydon-Miller, 1984). Central to these goals is the concept of "communally" generated knowledge or knowledge from dialogue. Park (1993) argues that participants involved in the dialogical process often change by becoming more aware, more critical, more assertive, more creative, and more active" (p. 2).

One assumption of participatory research that promotes a democracy of participation is collaboration. Collaboration implements a reciprocal dimension to the service learning process. For collaboration to occur, service learning programs must divest themselves of language that defines roles in terms of provider and recipient and instead describe participants as service partners. This switch in terms emphasizes mutual respect for the individual strengths and weaknesses each partner brings to the service relationship. Additionally, assumption of collaboration also recognizes that all service partners have needs, and that learning may occur for all participants. Service learning programs must also avoid having the goals and outcomes of service predetermined, before the student enters into a service relationship. Instead, a

service project must be shaped by all partners and occur in the process of speaking with each other, analyzing information, and engaging in collective action.

Another assumption of service learning that promotes a democracy of participation is the reflectivity of all service partners. Reflexivity is already perceived as a critical activity of service learning programs. Typically however, only the students reflect, and this reflection occurs in the classroom context with peers and the instructor, and does not include the other service participants.

To ensure the reflexivity of all service partners, the service learning experience should be conceptualized in terms of a "dialogue" rather than an activity to satisfy particular needs or goals. The Greek word "dialogos" refers to meaning or understanding through, thus dialogue is an event where meaning emerges through all participants (Stewart & Logan, 1993). Philosopher Martin Buber (1970) uses the term "dialogue" to label a quality or type of interaction that emphasizes mutuality, reciprocity, and involvement.

In dialogue, individuals create meanings and negotiate the complex relations between themselves and others (Shotter & Gergen, 1994). An interactive, dialogical form of reflection not only enables service partners to explore each other's opinions, desires, and perspectives, but also helps increase each individual's understanding of their personal strengths and potential for change. Additionally, "service" itself is a social construct and making sense of the service experience cannot happen in a vacuum but rather is created and created in the dialogical process.

A final assumption of service learning that promotes a democracy of participation is the mutual empowerment of all service partners. Ellsworth (1992) describes empowerment as the process of "expanding the range of possible social identities people may become" (p. 99). Typically, service

learning programs emphasize the intellectual growth and social development of the student. Those already on the periphery of society are further marginalized when they are left out of the learning cycle. To promote mutual empowerment, all participants must be positioned as teacher and learner in the educational process. Service learning activities must be ones that allow for service partners to identify questions and formulate conclusions that are both meaningful and resonate with their experience. Empowerment can also occur in the course of dialogue as service partners define themselves in their own terms and name their own reality. For service recipient's in particular, identity construction may counter the hegemonic discourse of "needs" and enable them to both envision themselves and act in new social identities, such as teacher.

Participatory Research as a Pedagogical Tool

The assumptions of collaboration, the reflexivity of all participants, and mutual empowerment are instantiated in particular practices of participatory research which can be applied to the classroom and service learning. Participatory research captures the ideal of what Dewey (1916) and Freire (1970) refer to as goal-oriented, experiential learning, and transformative pedagogy. As pedagogical praxis, participatory research teaches the ideals and values of a participatory democracy to all service learning partners. Participatory research begins with a problem. The sense of the problem arises from the people who are affected by it and whose interest demands that it be solved. The problem addressed is social in nature, and calls for a collective solution, otherwise there is no participatory exigency.

The process of conducting participatory research is embodied in three components, or collective activities: social investigation, education, and action (Maguire, 1987). Through dialogue, service partners try to identify the hows and whys of a problem's existence. Because the research problem is seen to

originate within the community itself, all service learning partners are directly involved in identifying not only what issue(s) is(are) to be investigated but they are also involved in the creation of the research project as well. By examining the hows and whys, the partners are able to unravel the complexities of the social reality in which they live, but may not understand. As partners reflect, they become more aware of and believe in their own abilities for organizing. In seeing themselves capable of producing and defining their own reality, service partners may develop a greater consciousness and analysis of the political context and of their situation, and may become more empowered to change it.

There is no generalized mode for conducting participatory research although several methods are presented with the literature espousing the use of participatory research methods. Maguire (1987) develops a particularly useful framework by integrating the phases of participatory research identified by VioGrossi et all (1983), and the guidelines for participatory research outlined by Hall (1981). This model of participatory research is appropriate for classroom use.

The initial phase of participatory research is one of organizing the project and becoming knowledgeable of the working area. The activities of the student focus on becoming familiar with the issues of the community. Activities might include such things as observation, reading historical accounts, or establish relationships with community organizations and leaders.

The second phase is one of uncovering the significant issues salient to participating members. Most important, is that the description of the community needs must reflect and amplify the perceptions of the community members. This phase of issue formulation begins with service partners exploring each others opinions, thoughts, desires, and perspectives, as well as uncovering generative themes and shared concerns through dialogue. In the course of

dialogue, specific issues for investigation are highlighted. Additionally, the particular scope and dimensions of the issue(s) to be explored is determined. The issue-posing process provides a deeper and more critical understanding of the reality perceived and experienced by all service partners.

The third, fourth, and fifth phases of participatory research most often occur concurrently. The third phase focuses on collective activities that attempt to link the perceptions and interpretations of the service partners to broader social structures and relations. Once social themes are identified, the participants design a process to collectively investigate the specific issue(s). During this phase, project participants develop their own theories and solutions to the issues by engaging in the research process. Since everybody connected to the service project has provided input as to the research objectives, all are able to participate with the gathering of data and analysis. The final phase in conducting participatory research occurs as service partners decide how to apply the knowledge and skills gained in the research process. Facts that emerge from the research are readily useful for organizing community projects, shaping social policies, and implementing a variety of measures for social change.

Conclusion

If democracy is to be legitimately linked to education, then the meaning of democracy must be reconsidered by educators (Grambs & Carr, 1979; Beane, 1990). To educate young people to be productive citizens and ensure that the democratic objective of equality is realized, service learning must adopt an alternative paradigm that promotes the ideals and values of a participatory democracy. According to Barber (1992), "Civic education should be communal as well as community based. If citizen education and experiential learning of the kind offered by community service are to be a lesson in community, the ideal

learning unit is not the individual but the small team, where people learn together, experiencing what it means to become a small community together" (p. 255). The theoretical assumptions and practices of participatory research accomplish this.

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